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ABSTRACT

To address the needs of at-risk black males the Positive Impact Program (PIP) was organized. Teachers and parents were asked to refer black boys in kindergarten through eighth grade who exhibited low self-esteem; lack of motivation; poor academic record; chronic disciplinary problems; poor school attendance; poor hygiene and personal care habits; poor social skills; and disrespect for authority. At an organizational meeting the boys were assigned an advisor and they and their parents agreed to 13 guidelines among which were: (1) being obedient to advisors, teachers, and parents; (2) study each night a minimum of 1.5 hours; (3) attend church services at least once a week; (4) tell advisor their hobby, what they plan to be when grown up and what they are willing to do to get there, what they like and dislike about self; and (5) refrain from cursing and swearing. Each advisor met weekly with his group of 4-16 boys to discuss PIP concerns. All the groups met together for activities once or twice a month. The objectives of the program were to provide positive role models, emotional support, enhance self-esteem, foster awareness and appreciation of cultural heritage, enhancing community pride, recreational activities, and support and encouragement to deal with negative peer pressure. PIP chose to address these areas of concern: teenage pregnancy; Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome; sexually transmitted diseases; suicide; gangs; and failure to acquire a high school diploma. According to a 1992 questionnaire all boys except one in the PIP program demonstrated improvement in attitude and performance. (ABL)

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POSITIVE IMPACT PROGRAM (PIP)

FOR AT-RISK BLACK MALES

Charles R. Cobbs, Odell McCallum

Wynne (AR) Public Schools

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the
Mid-South Educational Research Association,
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Positive Impact Program (PIP)

for At-risk Black Males

History

In October of 1990, Mr. Leon Wigginton, Superintendent of the Wynne School District, encouraged some school administrators to attend a conference on at-risk students. After the meeting, Odell McCallum, elementary principal, returned home with a troubled conscience. McCallum said, "There was one reoccurring theme; black males were headed toward becoming an endangered species because so many of them were in prison, on drugs, unemployed, or committing crimes. This problem forced me to think about the black boys in Wynne" (Wynne Progress, p. 1, 2).

Mr. McCallum's concerns led to several meetings with business and professional men to discuss the future of Wynne boys. After these meetings, a group of black men worked to organize the Positive Impact Program. Sixteen black males were selected as role models to serve as student advisors.

Guidelines and Criteria

To begin the program, teachers and parents were asked to refer black boys who were in kindergarten through eighth grade who exhibited the following characteristics: (1) low self-esteem, (2) lack of motivation, (3) poor academic record, (4) chronic disciplinary problems, (5) poor school attendance, (6) poor hygiene and personal-care habits, (7) poor social skills, and (8) a disrespect for authority. The boys also are required to indicate if they are from a one-parent home, two-parent home, guardian or foster home, or an extended family.

To organize the program, the advisors met with the referred group of boys and their parents or guardians. At this meeting, each boy who agreed to participate in the program was assigned an advisor, and both the boy and his parents received a list of the following guidelines:

1. Be obedient to advisors, teachers, and parents.
2. Study each night a minimum of 1 hour and 30 minutes.
3. Attend church services at least once per week.
4. Be at home during week nights at 8:00 P.M. unless under supervised activity - Weekends by 9:00 P.M.
5. Give advisor the name of your best friend.
6. Tell advisor your hobby.
7. Tell advisor what you want to be when you grow up.
8. Tell advisor what you are willing to do to get there.
9. Tell advisor how you feel about yourself.
10. Tell advisor what you like about yourself.
11. Tell advisor what you dislike about yourself.
12. Give advisor the name of someone you admire.
13. Refrain from cursing and swearing.

The advisor meets with his group of boys (4 - 16) weekly to discuss PIP objectives and concerns. All groups meet together for activities once or twice monthly.

Funding

The Positive Impact Program is funded through donations from churches, businesses, individuals, and community clubs and organizations. Advisors, parents, businessmen, teachers, and community leaders have volunteered time and services to the program.

Objectives

The Positive Impact Program has the following objectives:

1. To provide positive male role models for the youth of the Wynne Community.
2. To provide emotional support for the youth through regular contacts with their teachers and pastors, and by being available to counsel with them when necessary.
3. To enhance the self-esteem of the youth and to motivate them to strive for excellence in every aspect of their lives through the use of motivational speakers, including successful graduates from Wynne and surrounding communities and other experiences.
4. To provide a means of enhancing the awareness of and appreciation for cultural heritage.
5. To provide a means of enhancing the youth's sense of community pride by encouraging involvement in planning and implementing civic endeavors and service projects.

6. To provide an opportunity for individual and group recreational activities including trips to ball games, attending church services, going out to a restaurant, etc., with positive adult role models.

7. To provide additional support and encouragement to the youths who are self-motivated and already excelling academically by helping them deal with negative peer pressure.

Concerns and Activities

PIP has chosen to specifically address six areas of concern for at-risk students: (1) teen pregnancy, (2) AIDS, (3) sexually transmitted diseases, (4) suicide, (5) gangs, and (6) failure to acquire a high school diploma.

According to Wynne School District nurse, Mrs. Scott Puryear, 19 girls were pregnant in the 1989-1990 school year; 28 were pregnant in the 1990-1991 school year, and 12 girls were pregnant in the 1991-1992 school year. In an attempt to address this local problem, PIP has encouraged its members to follow the Bauer, Dobson (1990) four-point proposal for parents and educators: (1) secure the involvement of parents in the lives of at-risk children, (2) teach sexual abstinence to teenagers, (3) remove the incentives for teens to become pregnant, and (4) lead and motivate children early in life that to live a life of purity is a by-product of spiritual commitment and understanding.

To focus on the seriousness of AIDS and STD, PIP offers individual counseling, films, and video presentations to make PIP participants more aware of these growing problems and their effects on individuals and families.

Because suicide has become a serious problem among our nation's youth (Bryant, 1991), it, too, is a major concern of PIP. It is the second leading cause of death among 15 to 24 year-olds. Marks (1990) found that 27% of adult Arkansans knew a relative or friend who had committed suicide or made a suicide attempt. He also noted that boys aged 10-14 are three times more likely to commit suicide than are girls. Fortunately, none of the participants in PIP have displayed any suicidal tendencies. Nevertheless, suicide is an area that deserves attention.

Another worry of PIP is the influence of gangs in the community. Stephens (1991) stated that although youth gangs have been a part of American life since the early 18th century, today's gangs pose a greater threat to public safety and order than at any time in recent history. Youth gangs, which at one time had primarily a social basis for their organization and existence, are now motivated by violence, extortion, intimidation and the illegal trafficking of drugs and weapons. Hayden (1991) states that gang activity is widespread in Arkansas and picking up momentum in Eastern Arkansas. It is for this reason that PIP and its sponsors are addressing the negative aspect of gang life. PIP advisors work closely with the Wynne Police Department, Arkansas State Police, Cross County Circuit Judge, and retail merchants of Wynne. These organizations aided in presenting a drug program, a shop lifting program, and a tour of the county jail.

A final area of concern recognized by the PIP program is the failure of at-risk students to acquire a high school diploma. Drop-outs cost American taxpayers many billions of dollars in lost local, state, and federal tax revenues. Not all the costs,

however, are in dollars. Seventy-one percent of prison inmates never completed high school. Dropouts become heads of households where the cycles of their own lives are repeated. Uneducated adolescents become unskilled or semi-skilled workers who cannot contribute fully in education, science, business, or industry (Catterall, 1987). PIP tries to focus the group's attention on the importance of finishing high school while setting personal goals. In an attempt to do this, PIP has brought in motivational speakers such as Drew Brown, a pilot for Federal Express and the only black navy pilot to serve in the Vietnam War; Scott and Jerome Lyons, 1984 graduates of Wynne High School who were featured in Ebony magazine as outstanding engineers for General Motors, and Dr. Thomas Beasley, an ophthalmologist renowned throughout the mid-south. Another program was presented by Gerald Carter, a body builder and weight lifter from Evansville, Indiana.

Parent and Community Involvement

Parents are an integral part of the PIP program. They are given copies of guidelines which the participants are encouraged to follow. Parents are invited to attend meetings, to help with programs, and to chaperon field trips. They are encouraged to meet with PIP advisors once per month.

The community has been involved in PIP by providing volunteers in a homework assistance program, by hiring participants for summer work opportunities, and by providing guest speakers for programs. Local churches have provided facilities for Bible study and activities.

PIP has involved itself in the community by participating in a community clean-up project, by growing vegetables and distributing them within the community, by collecting food for the needy and money for Friends of the Library, and by constructing a bus shelter on city property.

Program Success

The PIP program is relatively new, but no participant has since been involved in a problem with the law. Parents of PIP participants have become move involved in school related activities like parent visitation. According to a 1992 teacher questionnaire, all boys except one in the PIP program demonstrated improvement in attitude and performance.

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